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EDITORIAL

THE EVIL SPOKEN OF PHYSICIANS AND THE ANSWER THERETO

In the initial volume of the Proceedings of the Charaka Club, Dr. Dana has already handled the negative aspect of this theme.¹ He has not only isolated the hardest and meanest sayings against our profession, but has classified them with reference to their stereotypy and their relative futility. He began (he says) to collect such things in a scrap-book, then finding that their monotonous sameness rather bored and discouraged him, he finally discovered that the thing had already been done in the 17th century by Bernier and latterly in three volumes by Witkowski, entitled *Le mal qu'on a dit des médecins*. Dana notes that the multifarious indictments of medicine in the past fall easily into sets of trite monotones or categories. These rusty weapons and damp ammunition, formerly employed so continuously to belittle our profession, ran, as a rule, to some such types as the following:

1. The doctor usually kills rather than cures.
2. Nature, left to herself, will usually heal the patient, but drugging may harm or kill him.
3. The doctor is a pompous, pedantic, ceremonious duffer, who talks learnedly out of books to conceal his ignorance of reality.
4. In medical consultations, the patient is slain by the *force majeure* of numbers.
5. The demands of professional ethics and etiquette were formerly such, that it was deemed better for a patient to die by rule (*secundum*

¹ C. L. Dana: *Tr. Charaka Club*, N. Y., 1902, I, 77-90. The object of this editorial is to supplement the contributions of Witkowski, Dana and others by some other findings, collected over a number of years.

artem) than to recover in defiance of medical principles. This affectation of legality or pontifical infallibility is, and has been, the weak link (in the eyes of enemies, the crooked element) in medical practice. It is here naturally that the quack finds his opportunity and gets his innings.

6. The doctor trades upon illness, gets rich through the prevalence of disease, whenever it does not affect himself or impoverish his clientèle. He is one of the few professional people who is not punishable for murder. He is, in fact, hand in glove with the undertaker.
7. He pours medicines, of which he knows little, into bodies of which he knows less.

For over twenty-five centuries, at least, these stereotyped slurs were cast up against physicians without let or hindrance. Why? Dr. Dana answers this question elsewhere, as follows: "Of all sciences, the medical have been the slowest in growth . . . In the history of medicine, there is no more notable feature than this prolonged absence of all real progress."² Before 1850, in fact, the history of medicine is a somewhat gloomy recital of ups and downs, like Carlyle's account of walking, in which progression is made as much by falling as by rising. In each period, there was the same illusion of progress, but, in retrospect, the sombre truth in Lecky's lines seems all too patent:

"Still the world seems mounting higher,
Chasing unfulfilled desire,
Spurning barrier, prop and chain,
Scatt'ring darkness, conquering pain,
Winning much, but in each prize,
Some sad germ of evil lies;
For the subtle taint that blends
With all human hopes and ends,
Making good the seed of ill,
Rules the course of nations still."

The physician of the past was the creature of his *milieu*, and, as ancient medicine lagged almost continually behind the other sciences, his occasional manslaughterings and malpractice did but reflect his ignorance and incompetence and perhaps even blunted his ethical feeling. The confidence and respect accorded to a competent physician

² C. L. Dana: *The Peaks of Medical History*. New York, 1927.

to-day, even in the greater scientific academies of the world, is due in part to physics and chemistry, the *impetum facientes* of scientific medicine, and to the sterling, honorable character of such comparatively recent medical men as John Hunter, who boldly inoculated himself with a dangerous disease, or Bichat, Bretonneau, Laennec, Louis, Bright, Addison, Hodgkin, Virchow, Helmholtz, Huxley, Charcot, Littré, Lister. Names of this particular ethical lustre begin to swarm in the modern period, but appear as rare beacon lights, *longo intervallo*, in antiquity and the not very distant past. An anecdote will illustrate just what this steady increase in physicians of unblemished honor implies. At a medical gathering I once attended, a guest resorted to the trite expedient of reading off the fatal terminations of the Hippocratic case-histories (25 in number) as an example of the killing propensities of our profession. Dr. Jacobi, whom I sat beside, expressed some impatience at this labored expression of "American humor" and went on to say that, in his recollection, hundreds of average practitioners had worked themselves well nigh to extinction, in honest effort to get their patients well. He added that a doctor with a poor reputation for recoveries would soon lose his clientèle. As Billings said: "The public is not always sagacious, but in the long run, it does somehow contrive to find out who are the skilled lawyers and doctors." One recalls a long succession of lay visitors at the Army Medical Museum, whose inquiries on this head were serious to the point of outlining their personal ailments ("money no object"). This being the case, modern medicine, as Dana observes, can endure any satire directed against it with provoking equanimity and "it is well for the knights of the pen to keep a sharp eye upon us and to pull out from the barrel an ancient jest from time to time as occasion requires."

Arranging some of these ancient jests in serial order of time, it is noticeable that each nation and each period had its peculiar line of attack, a view-point all its own. In antiquity, for instance, it is plain that the effective

sharpshooters came, not from the tribal Teutons, Gauls, Slavs or Caledonians, but from fairly sophisticated civilizations. The utterances of China and India suggest, somehow, that medicine in Asia could not have amounted to much before the invasion of Alexander the Great.

CHINA

Medicine is one of the nine low trades. Chinese Folk Proverb.

A single untried popular remedy often throws the scientific doctor into hysterics. Chinese Folk Proverb.

To be a writer requires the wasting of paper: to be a doctor requires the sacrificing of lives. Su Tung Po.

Doctors cannot cure their own complaints. Huai Nan-tzu.

Cow's urine, the excreta of horses and the tops of old drums are collected and sold as remedies. Nan-Yu.

INDIA

Even experienced and capable physicians, fertile in remedies, are tormented and harried by diseases, as gazelles by hunters. In spite of the decoctions and oils they swallow, they are broken by age, as are trees by mighty elephants.

Physicians live by rich patients, officials by unlucky princes, princes by litigants and clever men by fools.

Soldiers long for war, physicians for patients, clay for water, Brahmins for land and beggar-monks for the fat of the land.

Subtle, indeed, are sundry allusions to medicine in the Bible and the Talmud:

He who sins against his Creator must come into the hands of physicians. Jesus Sirach. xxxvi, 38.

In his disease he sought not to the Lord but to the physicians. And Asa slept with his fathers. II Chronicles, xvi, 15-16.

Physician, heal thyself. Luke, iv, 23.

And a certain woman, which had an issue of blood twelve years, and had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse. Mark, v, 25-26.

Do not live in a city governed by a physician. Talmud, Pesachim 113a.

A physician who heals for nothing heals in vain. Talmud, Baba Kama 85a.

The best of doctors will go to hell. Talmud, Kiduschin 82a.

The Greeks, as Spengler has beautifully shown, existed without reference to the past or the future. Their civiliza-

tion stands apart, like a closed system in physics. Their mathematics was mainly geometry, their historical records of late provenance, their medicine a thing complete in itself. The most extraordinary national culture which the world has known reposed upon a substratum of slavery and the raw blood-thirst of the primitive (*Ægisthus*, *Thyestes*). As Dr. John R. Oliver points out,³ the Hippocratic Oath tells what medicine and the doctor *ought* to be, but what the average practitioner may have been is indicated in *Æsop's* fable of "The Incompetent Physician;" in Plato's account of the slave-doctors who treated slaves and the free-born doctors who found out about their patients from their friends (*The Law*); in *Æschines'* reference to the *Iatreia* as places of ill-fame (*Speech against Timarchus*). The satirical comments on medicine by the greater writers are those of a highly sophisticated intelligentsia, who had their dabbings in faith-cure and "New Thought":

GREECE

Thou hast suffered sorrow and humiliation. Thou art forsaken of thy wits and art gone astray; and like an unskilled leech fallen ill, thou lovest heart and canst not discover what remedies to minister to thine own disease. *Æschylus: Prometheus*, 472-475.

The surest sign of bad government and social anarchy is to find many judges and many physicians. Plato.

Physicians heal those among us whom they wish to heal and injure those whom they wish to injure, by cutting and burning them and putting them to expense as tribute, of which they apply little or nothing to the patients' welfare, and use the rest for themselves and their fellows. In fine, they take money as compensation, even from the patient's relatives or enemies, in order to kill him. Plato (*Politics*, v, 298).

None so stupid as grammarians, excepting physicians. Athenaeus.

Only physicians and judges can kill without being killed. Philemon.

In his youth, Aristotle dissipated his inheritance in debauchery, had to become a soldier, and even played the charlatan by selling quack remedies in markets. Epicurus.

'Tis not a skillful leech, who mumbles charms o'er ills that need the knife. Sophocles: *Ajax*, 581-582.

I am no poor-man's physician, you poor devil! Aristophanes: *Acharnians*, 1027.

³ Oliver: *Internat. Clin.*, Phila., 1927, 37. ser., III, 237-247.

Clearly, there is not a single physician who wishes good health even to his intimate friends, nor a soldier who wishes peace for his country. Philemon.

How bad it would be for doctors if everybody else were well and thriving! Philemon.

Internists are seldom jealous of surgeons, nay they back up and recommend one another. Plutarch.

It is not the affair of a friend but of a sophist to bolster up his own reputation by the failings of others and to swagger in public like the surgeons, who do their operations in a theater to attract more money. Plutarch.

The Roman gibes reflect their definite contempt for Greek medicine.

ROME

Our forefathers did not blame medicine, but drugging and principally because it was plied as a trade to make a livelihood . . . and to this day, it alone, of all Greek arts, is held to be beneath Roman dignity, in spite of its rich rewards. Pliny the Elder, xxix, 16-17.

How many sick people did Themison kill in one autumn? Juvenal, x, 221.

Emperor Tiberius said that a man over sixty who can not take his own pulse is ridiculous, and to ask a doctor what is most digestible is as silly as to ask him what is sweet, bitter or sour. Plutarch.

I hate doctors because they are always making me eat the flesh of ducks. Petronius, *Satyricon* C. 56

It is striking that there is no art so incomprehensible or liable to change its methods oftener than medicine, as there is none other so lucrative. Pliny the Elder, xxix, 2.

Where do we find greater opportunity to poison or to become the inheritor of one's victims than in medicine? Or for adultery, even in imperial houses, as in the case of Eudemus with Livia and Valens with Empress Messalina? But that is not the fault of the art but of its practitioners. Pliny the Elder, xxix, 20.

Crudelem medicum intemperans aeger facit. Doctors are cruel with refractory patients. Publius Syrius.

Male secum agit aeger medicum qui heredem facit. Woe to the sick man who makes a physician his heir. Publius Syrius.

In the Middle Ages, medical practice sank into "almost unexampled degradation" (Allbutt). The clinical textbooks of the time were huge, well arranged and well indexed, but the information conveyed was meagre. Therapy was mainly herbal and showed little advance upon Pliny and Dioscorides, and, unless protected by great nobles and

prelates, the average internist or surgeon had usually the social status of a strolling player or vagabond. Like Chaucer's "parfit practisour," he "loved gold in especial," and took over some of the tricks of Arabian charlatanry to keep his patients or to wiggle out of tight situations. In this period arose the well known epigrams about professional jealousy (*Medicus medicum odit*), the atheistic tendencies of the profession (*Ubi tres medici, duo athei*), the doctor's license to lie (*Medico mentiri licet*) and to kill (*Medicis solis licet impune occidere*), his assimilation to the Cambodians in "Wang" with reference to fees (*Post mortem, medicus!*), as also his obligation to collect fees while the patient was still ailing (*Accipe dum dolet, post mortem medicus olet*). The spirit of Salerno is reflected in the apple-a-day distich of Friedrich von Logau, which Longfellow renders:

"Joy and Temperance and Repose
Slam the door on the doctor's nose."

In the Renaissance period, all the hard things said about the profession were reiterated by Petrarch and by the Welsh epigrammatist, John Owen (1560-1622), who sounded a new variation in the familiar *Dat Galenus opes*:

"Dat Galenus opes, dat Jutinianus honores,
Dumne sit patiens iste nec ille cliens.
Galen gets wealth and Justinian honor, so long as
the first is not sick and the second not a client."

Shakespeare's

"Thou speak'st like a physician, Helicanus,
Who minister'st a potion unto us
That thou wouldst tremble to receive thyself"

was turned about by Bismarck: "Physicians still retain something of their priestly origin: they would gladly do what they forbid." Luther said: "Medicine makes sick patients, for doctors imagine diseases, as mathematics makes hypochondriacs and theology sinners." He despised physicians and seldom (if ever) paid them. Erasmus called them "torturers and harpies." Montaigne observes that the physicians of his time "know their Galen

well and their patients not at all," that "medicine is credited with every cure made by nature" and that "all cures are undertaken at the risk of human life. They carve us, burn us, deprive us of our food and our blood and lo! a step further and we are restored to health." In the 17th century, medical satire was spread upon a large canvas by Molière, who, upon the stage, ridiculed the doctor as never before. A neat gibe was that of Scarron—"*les doctes assassins que nous appellons médecins*"—which preludes the age of intensive blood-letting (up to the time of Louis), when medicine came in for its hardest knocks at the hands of the literary. The old Roman caution about legacies is revived in a line of Crébillon père (*Rhadamiste*):

"Ah! doit-on hériter de ceux qu'on assassine?"

Another observer of the transition period, Leibnitz, introduces a new formula, which was to be copied for nearly two centuries: "I often say a great doctor kills more people than a great general." This was a favorite line of thought with Frederick the Great, who asked Zimmermann: "How many graveyards have you filled?" When Frederick asked another physician if his reputation was not based upon an initial hecatomb of 2000 patients, he met with the unexpected come-back that "the prowess of the greatest soldier of his time may well have cost millions of lives." This was probably the origin of the well worn platitude about the general who has slain his ten thousands. Frederick gave the Chevalier Taylor the title of Court Oculist (at his own request) and then told him that he had no need for his services himself and would hang him if he attempted to ply his art upon any of his subjects. In the same key, Addison opined that "When a nation abounds in physicians, it grows thin of people." Kant said: "Physicians think they do a lot for a patient when they give his disease a name." Lessing has a very modern fling at the sacerdotal aspect of the physician: "Haller, I hear, made it a fashion for physicians to die in the odor of sanctity. It was not always so, indeed a doctor's religion was once more suspect than that of a drama-

tic poet. How times have changed! We may yet see a doctor of theology writing on dysentery." And so it goes, up to the well-known sneer of Mephistopheles in Goethe's *Faust* or the epigram of Sir Astley Cooper: "The science of medicine is founded upon conjecture and improved by murder."

When we come to Voltaire's inquiry, "Who are the greatest deceivers? The doctors? and the greatest fools? The patients," we are well into the spirit of our own period. The essential feature of such medical satires as Samuel Butler's *Erewhon*, Octave Mirbeau's *L'Epidemie*, Jules Romain's *Knock*, Hermann Hesse's *Kurgast* or Michel Corday's *Les Embrasés* is that ridicule is transferred from the doctor to the patients, or at least to the ineptitudes of crowd psychology in encouraging quackery and incompetence in medicine. There is even a faint hint of this tendency in Tolstoi's sombre study, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*. The patient has become, as it were, *particeps criminis* in relation to his own plight,⁴ at any rate, some sort of a culprit. This is the ironic note in Butler's *Erewhon*: If a person is not in robust health, it is his own fault, an exaggeration which derives, perhaps, from the extraordinary improvement in public health occasioned by the conquest of communicable diseases, the perfection of surgery, gynecology, obstetrics and dentistry, the new science of infant welfare and the revival of Greek athletics. The Greeks and the Romans knew nothing of infection but believed in the healing power of Nature, hence attacked communicable diseases from within by strengthening the body (gymnastics, military training). The Jews, who had a clear notion of infection, attacked the evil from without (segregation in leprosy, diphtheria, gonorrhœa, Mosaic incineration of fomites). The development of these two lines of action is mainly responsible for the vast numbers of sound, healthy and athletic people now seen in civilized countries. At the time when Lemuel Shattuck drafted his famous report on the sanitary con-

⁴ *Crimen quos inquinat æquat.*

dition of Massachusetts (1850), there were vast numbers of people in the United States who had no health whatever.⁵ The people who grin and show their teeth at us in the illustrated supplements of the Sunday newspapers seem like Wilkie Collins' muscular Christians, "too unhealthily conscious of their unconscious healthiness." But the starting point of medicine and hygiene is expressed in the old aphorism of Herophilus, that there is nothing so completely disastrous to an individual as to lose his health. From this angle, let us consider, not too curiously, the brighter side of the past history of our profession, as conveyed in the personal aspirations of great physicians and the more appreciative utterances of great persons about the science and art of medicine. Collected over many years, the following are arranged with references to *manière de voir* rather than to chronologic sequence:

THE ANSWER

Last year, I was afflicted with a grave illness and at death's door. I called in a physician. I can express my thanks for his care and zeal to heal only through your gracious coöperation: I request that he be admitted to the rights of Roman citizenship. Pliny the Younger to Trajan, x, 4.

There is something in sickness that breaks down the pride of manhood. Charles Dickens.

As long as a man is sick and wants to live, he will employ physicians and abuse them. La Bruyère.

Although we jeer
In health, when ill, we call them to attend us,
Without the least propensity to sneer. Lord Byron.
I only take money from sick people. Bretonneau to a hypochondriac.
Every man's disease is his personal property. Alonzo Clark.

I travel through life like a courier, with no place to lay my head, no leisure left to take in the great spectacle of the world and enjoy it. I get into my carriage every morning and leave it in the evening. Maximilian Stoll.

My patients are mostly among the poor, while I went to the country to see my sick children, half a day upwards of fifty knocks at my door, yet

⁵ See, in particular, the admirable study of Gjerset and Hektoen on the desperate plight of Norwegian immigrants into Wisconsin before the arrival of a *bona fide* doctor of medicine from Oslo. *Norweg.-Amer. Histor. Assoc. Stud. & Rec.*, Minneapolis, 1926, I, 1-59.

through all this I am favored with calmness. My lot seems to be cast among misery and death. Griffiths, 1800.

At one time, but three physicians were able to do duty outside of their own houses. From this cruel summer until 1806, no year left us free of the fever, but the worst of it fell upon us in 1798. Benjamin Rush.

Through all of these sad years, we find always ready, always dutiful the best of the men whose lives I have sketched. Scarce one escaped the wounds of disease and at least six died, but none failed us. Surely, this is a record to look back upon with that pride which nourisheth good example. Weir Mitchell of the epidemic of 1798-1806.

My constant routine work in daily practice for sixty years has kept me in solitude, away from the good and great men, ever away from music and literature, and away from those who called me friend. Abraham Jacobi.

The little good I have done is that which has cost me the greatest trouble and has encountered the most numerous obstacles. William Hunter.

My lectures were highly esteemed, but I am of opinion my operations rather kept down my practice. Sir Astley Cooper.

My own success depended upon my zeal and industry, but for this I take no credit, as it was given to me from above. Sir Astley Cooper.

I said in my heart: in this corner you are going to learn or die. Felix Platter.

Rudolphi was no less great as a man than as a scholar—*integer vitae scelerisque purus*. Any one who knew him was bound to love and respect him, and even though his frankness of speech might sometimes hurt a little, one could not long resist his charm. What above everything else he demanded of people was righteousness, honesty of mind and freedom from all unworthy motives . . . In any ignoble mood, I should avoid looking at the portrait of my fatherly counsellor, and it is when I recall the noblest experiences of my life that I think at once of Rudolphi. Johannes Müller.

It reëchoes in my soul like a theme from Beethoven, Schubert or Brahms. Theodor Billroth on the above.

Physicians are better to-day and heal diseases better than in the days of Hippocrates and Galen. Fortunato Fedeli.

Because the newer methods of treatment are good, it does not follow that the old ones were bad: for if our honorable and worshipful ancestors had not recovered from their ailments, you and I would not be here to-day. Confucius.

In medicine, sins of commission are mortal, sins of omission venial. Tronchin.

Medicine is as old as the human race, as old as the necessity for the removal of diseases. Heinrich Haeser.

The methods of quackery are merely a theft from the most ancient phases of folk-medicine. Sudhoff.

Science is the topography of ignorance. O. W. Holmes.

But like a man walking alone in the darkness, I resolved to proceed so slowly and with such circumspection that, even if I did not get very far, I was certain not to fall. Descartes (*Discours de la Méthode*, II).

Medicine absorbs the physician's whole being because it is concerned with the entire human organism. Goethe.

The education of most people ends upon graduation; that of the physician means a lifetime of incessant study. Marx.

To support and help others on occasion is every one's whim. It is the chief end of the doctor's existence. Marx.

Almost every one who goes to bed counts upon a full night's rest: Like a picket at the outposts, the doctor must be ever on call. Marx.

He, who has no notion of the inconceivable wealth of proven experience and helpful wisdom which is in medicine, may censure it as fragmentary, under the delusion of extenuating his own ignorance. Marx.

For thousands of years, medicine has united the aims and aspirations of the best and noblest of mankind. To depreciate its treasures is to discount all human endeavour and achievement at naught. Marx.

In the records of no other profession is there to be found so large a number of men who have combined intellectual preëminence with nobility of character. Osler.

In all periods, science has been advanced by individuals, never by the spirit of the age. The spirit of the age condemned Socrates to hemlock and burned Huss. Vaugenargues.

There are centuries in which public opinion is the most imbecile of all opinions. Chamfort.

Even in populous districts, the practice of medicine is a lonely road which winds uphill all the way, and a man may easily go astray and never reach the Delectable Mountains, unless he early finds those shepherd guides of whom Bunyan tells, Knowledge, Experience, Watchful and Sincere. Osler.

It was a magnificent moonlight evening and sitting up in the fifth story, I looked down on the city and tops of the trees and of course was sad. J. S. Billings.

I thought that all was right in the system of the universe—that consistent with our desires and passions was the shortness of our life and our being liable to suffering and disease—that without this we should have been inanimate, cold and heartless creatures. Sir Charles Bell.

Medicine was once the intellectual home in which I grew up, and even the emigrant best understands and is best understood by his native land. Helmholtz.

All knowledge attains its ethical value and its human significance only by the humane sense in which it is employed. Only a good man can be a great physician. Nothnagel.

A skillful physician can revive the springtime of life. Chinese Proverb.

Medicine is a sacred calling and he who make it ridiculous is guilty of sacrilege. Sudhoff.

If there is any possible means of increasing the common wisdom and ability of mankind, it is to be sought in medicine. Descartes (*Discours de la Méthode*, II).

Certainly physicians cannot prolong our lives by a single day: We live as long as God wills; but it makes a great difference whether we live miserably, like poor dogs, or keep well and fresh, and here a wise physician can do much for us. Goethe.

When I was young, patients were afraid of me; now that I am old, I am afraid of patients. Johann Peter Frank.

When controversy bursts forth, the first one to become silent is assuredly of good family. Talmud.

To connect accurate and faithful observations after death with symptoms displayed during life must be in some degree to forward the opportunities of our noble art. Richard Bright.

The poet is grieved by the indifference of his contemporaries, but the physician seems to be made philosophical by the steadying influence of every-day work, so that not Marcus Aurelius could have been more content than Auenbrugger, whilst a half-century passed by neglectful, and would not see the more than royal gift he offered to mankind. I am glad to think he was happy and to know that for all of us, as for him, this incessant everyday work is a talisman of content. Weir Mitchell.

So much of aspiration, of social ostracism endured, of obloquy repelled, of inestimable service rendered *gratis* to the poor, of incessant study, of intensive thought,

"Of labor that in lasting fruit outgrows,
Far noisier schemes, accomplished in repose"—

all these and more have gone to the simple proposition which Trousseau regarded as the chief aim of medicine, namely: "Get that patient well."

F. H. GARRISON